

timeless spirituality
and its relation to
some temporal practices
of
ʿIslām



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Abstract:

There exists a Divinely Revealed synergistic series of acts of worship in the form of various practices, exercises and devotions.

When put into practice these exercises or disciplines have the possibility — not a direct certainty but a tested possibility — of bringing about or eliciting in the practitioner a state of timeless spirituality which from another perspective might be seen as a state of complete transparency.

This paper, one of a series, discusses both how these practices can lead to the timeless transparent state and some aspects of that efulgent state of being.

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نَسْتُحَمِّدُكَ يَا خَيْرَ الْمَخْلُوقِ

Praise be to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds who, through His Eternal Word, does not cease to be praised: The Universally Merciful, The Singularly Compassionate, Who by His Mercy has stirred up within us gratitude for His goodness wherewith He has enriched us and inspired us to praise and glorify Him.

The limits of favour and the bounds of praise were extended when He promised to those grateful for His bounty still more blessings; and He spread wide the carpet of His Assembly to those who remember Him. He has brought into subjection all things according to His Wisdom and Equity, as He has willed, by His Power, so that by His Authority the mover remains still and the still moves. *'He is the First and the Last, The Outer and the Inner,'* (57:3) the Controller of expansion (*baṣṭ*) and contraction (*qabḍ*), *'the Knower of the Unseen (al-ghayb); not even the weight of an atom, or less than that or greater than that, either in the heavens or on the earth escapes Him.'* (34:3)

We praise Him with the praise of those who know Him with true knowledge of Him. We give thanks to Him with the expressions of gratitude of those who acknowledge the perfection of His goodness and favour. We bear witness that there is no deity other than Allāh ﷻ alone, having no companion, with an affirmation to which no doubt is attached and before which no door closes from accepting.

We further testify that our liege-lord Muḥammad ﷺ is the Perfected (*ʿinsānu-l-kāmil*) Worshipper (*ʿabdu-l-llāh*), His Slave and the Final Prophet and Messenger chosen from the mine of pure nobility, selected from a family of honour whose virtues speech falls short of describing. Allāh ﷻ bless and save him, with a blessing that will bring us to him and gather us around him on the Day of Assembly and Reckoning. May Allāh ﷻ be pleased with his family, his helpers, his descendants, the people of his household, his illustrious companions, the best of friends, as long as a star will shine, the full moon shall rise and a cloud shall float above the face of the earth.

There is a well known ḥadīth related by both al-Bukhārī and Muslim رحمهما on the authority of Abū ʿAbdu-r-Raḥmān ʿAbdullāh رحمهما, who said: “I heard the Rasūlullāh ﷺ say,

“ʾIslām is built on five¹: witnessing² (or testifying) that there is no deity save Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, standing (or establishing) the ṣalāh³, giving the zakāh⁴, pilgrimage to the House⁵, and fasting Ramaḍān.”⁶

In this paper we will examine, albeit quite briefly, how these five acts, incumbent upon all adult sane Muslims, are not only a means of surrendering (ʾislām) to the commands of Allāh ﷻ, but how these same acts are also the means to attaining to a state of timelessness and transparency which mystics everywhere have sought throughout time.

Here we must immediately draw the reader’s attention to the important point that ʾIslām, as such, is built on actions.

This is in line with the oft-repeated phrase in al-Qurʾān,

﴿الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ﴾

al-ladhīna ʾāmanū wa ʿamilū-ṣ-ṣaliḥāti

“...those who believe and do good deeds,”

(al-Baqarah 2:25)

¹ Usually the word pillars or cornerstones (arkān) is added in English but it is not in the Arabic text, though this is the generally accepted term.

² Shāhadah, from shāhida: to see with one’s own eyes, to experience personally, to be present, to bear witness, to testify.

³ Usually translated as “prayers”, even though prayer is a somewhat limited meaning (as we shall see) for a far more extensive and comprehensive act of worship than simply prayer, which in English, at least, conveys more the meaning of supplication (*duʿāʾ*), which is one of the constituent elements of ṣalāh but not its whole and all.

⁴ From zakāh which means to thrive, to grow, to increase, to be pure in heart and, as a term of Islamic Law, refers to the obligatory giving of alms or charity to the poor which has the effect of increasing and purifying one’s wealth in this world and the next.

⁵ The House is the Kaʿbah in Makkah sent down upon Adam عليه السلام, raised up by ʾIbrāhīm and Ismaʿīl عليهما السلام and purified by Muḥammad ﷺ.

⁶ The ninth month of the lunar calendar and ancient sacred month of the desert Arabs which cycles thru the solar year over a period of 33 years.

From this it should be clear that there is no question in ʾIslām of belief without action, as belief without action is sophistry, and action without belief has no true reward either in this world or, more especially, in the next.

﴿وَمَا تَقْدِمُوا إِلَّا أَنْفُسِكُمْ مِّنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ﴾

wa mā tuqaddimū li-ʾānfusikum-min khayrin
tajidūhu ʿinda-llāh

“...and whatever good you send forward for your selves
you will find it with Allāh.”

(*al-Baqarah* 2:112)

With that as a basis for understanding, let us look at the first of these actions, which is the direct eye witnessing of the Truth that there is no deity save Allāh ﷻ and that Muḥammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ.

As we have noted in the footnote on the preceding page, the Shāḥādah or, more properly, the Shāḥādatayn, as there are two integral parts involved, is a direct eye witnessing; a being present in the Presence and a personal testament to the basic truth underlying all of existence.

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

ʾashadu ʾan lā ʾilāha ʾilla-llāh
wa ʾashadu ʾanna muḥammadur-rasūlu-llāh

I bear witness that there is no deity except Allāh
and

I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh

When we speak of this direct eye witnessing, what we are really speaking about is realisation, and realisation is the basis of all true spirituality and that which separates true spirituality from what we might call “bookish” or derived spirituality: a weak and precarious spirituality that stems from the realisation of others rather than from our own direct vision of the truth.

As such it can never be the real firm basis or sound foundation for our life, but must always remain a shifting and evanescent type of realisation that may vanish or change in accord with the last book we have read or the last “authority” whose words we may have heard.

As an example of direct eye witnessing we may cite the example of the Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام (Moses) whose experience in directly “seeing” Allāh ﷻ is recorded in the Qurʾān.

“And when Mūsā came [to Mount Sinai] at the time set by Us and His Lord spoke to him he said, ‘Oh my Lord. Show [Your Self] to me that I might see you.’ [And Allāh] said, ‘Never can you see Me. However look at this mountain. If it stands still in its place then you will see Me.’ And when his Lord revealed His Glory (*tajallā*) to the mountain He caused it to crumble into dust and Mūsā fell down thunderstruck (*ṣaʿiqā*). And when he regained consciousness he said, ‘Glory be to You. I turn to you in repentance and I am first [of] the believers (*muʾminīn*).’” (*al-Aʿrāf* 4:143)

This, at the highest level, is what is meant by the first part of the *shahadah* in terms of human cognizance of the reality that beside or beyond Allāh ﷻ there is no other deity. This is not something ‘learned’ at the knee of one’s parents or in class from one’s teachers or as a result of cultural transmission.

It is pure existential knowledge that truly Allāh ﷻ exists and that truly there is no power or might save with Allāh ﷻ and that, without doubt, there is, and can be, no deity save Allāh ﷻ who is simultaneously the Source of Being and Being Itself.

For people living in our times a cognate of this experience might stem from ‘seeing’ the photographs taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, which reveal pillars of cosmic gasses and dust stretching more than three billion miles long, from which stars are pictured in their birth, or the Deep Field images in which the telescope, focused on a region the size of a grain of sand held at arm’s length, shows layer upon layer of galaxies each containing in excess of a billion stars.⁷

⁷National Geographic Magazine, Volume 191 No. 4, April 97.

Where does all this come from? Where is it going?

﴿ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴾

ʾinnā li-llāhi wa ʾinnā ʾilayhi rājiʿūn

“...truly we belong to Allāh and truly to him we return.”

(*al-Baqarah* 2:156)

And if the first part of the formula of faith deals with the Absolute Divine Reality which is the Principle thru and by which all that is has its Being then, lest we be left with no ground beneath our feet and, as it were, lost in space, the second part of the formula deals with the manifestation of that Reality in the form of the relative, the contingent, and the conditioned.

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

ʾashadu ʾan lā ʾilāha ʾilla-llāh
wa ʾashadu ʾanna muḥammadur-rasūlu-llāh

I bear witness that there is no deity except Allāh
and

I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh

Muḥammad ﷺ, which is to say the one who is glorified by the One⁸, is the Messenger, the Rasūl, the one who corresponds, the emissary, the envoy, the delegate of the One to the many.

The one who said of himself, “I was a prophet while Adam was still between clay and water (*bayna tīn wa māʾ*)”⁹ and, in another place, “between spirit and flesh” (*bayna rūhi wa-l-jasad*)¹⁰. A secret attested to by Abu Ḥurayrah رضي الله عنه in his report that when the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ was asked when the office of prophet had been established for him, he replied, “When Adam ﷺ had not yet had his spirit joined to his body.”¹¹

⁸Muḥammad from ḥamada which means he praises, he glorifies

⁹Jamaʿ as-Ṣaḡḥīr

¹⁰Ibn Abi Shāyba (14:292), Tirmidhi (*ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*), and Ḥakīm (*ṣaḥīḥ*)

¹¹at-Tirmidhī

“I am the first Prophet to be created and the last one to be sent.”¹² The Prophet, ﷺ, assured us that on the Day of Resurrection he will be “the first one for whose rising the earth would cleave.”¹³ On that day of Resurrection, “I shall be the ʾImām of the prophets, the one who speaks for them and the one who shall intercede (*shifāʾ*) for them.”¹⁴

This is not to deny the humanity of his blessed self ﷺ, for he always attested to his own humanity as Allāh ﷻ ordered him to say,

﴿ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ ﴾

innamā ʾana basharun mithlukum

“I am a human being like you.”
(*al-Kahf* 18:110)

It is to make clear however, that, although he existed in human form, yet there was something timeless in his being as in truth there is in all of our beings.

To realize the second part of the formula of faith is above all to become conscious that creation, as such, is in no way cut off from that which is its Source and Ground, for truly Allāh ﷻ has made clear,

﴿ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولَّوْا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ ﴾

faʾaynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu-llāh

“And wherever you turn there is the Face of Allāh.”
(*al-Baqarah* 2:115)

For as much as it is true that in the Absolute Sense only Allāh ﷻ can be said to Be, yet it is true that in the realm of the contingent all things are attached to Allāh ﷻ, for if they weren't they could have no being, since Allāh ﷻ is *the* source of all being.

¹²Aḥmad and Ḥakīm. Saḥḥawī declared it ṣaḥīḥ (authentic) in the “Maqasid” 1:327.

¹³Muslim

¹⁴Tirmidhī

Here we just touch briefly on the very outer surface of what, with patience and insight (*kashf*), can be gathered from the seemingly simple statement of witnessing that comprises the very cornerstone of ʿIslām.¹⁵

It is this possibility of internal insight and inspiration of the mind (ʿ*aql*), the heart (*qalb*), the self (*nafs*) and the soul (*rūḥ*) that indeed characterises all of the ʿarkān of ʿIslām.

Out of each of these simple acts flows a shining infinitude of interconnected and scintillating insights that open out into the timeless space of pure understanding that is the very food of the soul.

Some may ask, “What is the value of this?” to which we would say in the words of Allāh ﷻ on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ¹⁶:

من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

man ʿarif nafsahu faqad ʿarif rabbuhu

“Who knows himself knows his Lord.”

Or, echoed in the words that the Prophet ʿIsa ﷺ is reported¹⁷ to have uttered, “You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free.”

In the everyday world the *shahādatayn* is a constant companion of the Believer as he or she observes the command of Allāh ﷻ in the daily round of the *ṣalāh*.

At the setting of the sun, at the falling of the night and the appearance of the stars, before the rising of the sun, in the noontide and finally at the squeezings (ʿ*aṣr*) of the day the *shahādatayn* is on the lips of every Muslim in the *tashahhud*;

The *taḥyiyāt*: “Greetings to Allāh. Peace be upon you oh Prophet and the Mercy of Allāh and His Blessings. Peace be upon us and upon the righteous worshippers of Allāh —

¹⁵See the essay, “Manifestations of the Shadowless Presence” prepared for the International Mawlid an-Nabi Conference held in Chicago in 1995. Available from Noon Hierographers, Box 8, Keene, Va 22946

¹⁶Ḥadīth Qudsi

¹⁷John 8:32

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

ʾashadu ʾan lā ilāha illa-llāh
wa ʾashadu ʾanna muḥammadur-rasūlu-llāh

“I bear witness that there is no deity except Allāh
and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh.”

The order of Allāh ﷻ to establish the ṣalāh comes at the very beginning of the Qurʾān, right after the Opening (*al-Fātiḥah*).

۞ اَلَمْۤ اَكْتُبْ لَآ رَيْبَ ۞ فِيْهِ ۞ هٰذَا لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ
اَلَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ يُقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰتَ
وَ مِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ۞

ālif lāām mūm • dhālika-l-kitābu lā rayb: fi-hi hudal-l-li-l-
muttaqīn • alladhīna yuʾminu bi-l-ghaybi wa yuqimūna-ṣ-ṣalāta
wa mimā razaqnāhum yunfiqūn •

Alif Lāām Mūm

This is the book in which there is no doubt.

Guidance for those who fear Allāh.

Those who believe in the unseen and establish the ṣalāh
and spend [upon others] from that which We have given them.
(*al-Baqarah* 2:1-3)

The above can also be read as:

Alif Lāām Mūm

This is the book in which without doubt
there is guidance for those who fear Allāh.

Those who believe in the unseen and establish the ṣalāh
and spend[upon others] from that which We have given them.
(*al-Baqarah* 2:1-3)

It is true that it is the Book within which there is without doubt
guidance, and equally the Book in which there is no doubt.

In any case, it is Guidance for those who believe in the unseen
and establish the ṣalāh. People who fear Allāh, who are aware
of Allāh, who preserve themselves for Allāh.

Out of that consciousness¹⁸, out of that very real fear, out of that preservation of intimate purity for the sake of Allāh ﷻ alone, out of the belief in the unseen—the ʿimān of the ḡhayb — there arises that which establishes the ṣalāh, the worship of Allāh ﷻ which is, after all, our very reason for being.

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُنِي﴾

wa mā khalaqtu-l-jinna wa-l-ʿinsa ʿilla liyaʿbudūn

“I have not created the djinn or the people
other than to worship Me”

(az-Zāriyāt 51:56)

This ṣalāh, this act of worship, this act of slavery to Allāh—to none other than Allāh—is the recognition and continuous affirmation in the present of the oath we all took in pre-eternity.

﴿وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ
وَ أَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا ۖ
أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ﴾

waʿidh ʾakḥadḥa rabbuka mim banī ʾadama
min ḍḥuhurihim ḍḥurriyyatahum

waʾaṣḥadahum ʿalā ʾanfusihiḥ ʾalastu bi-rabbikum
qālū balā ṣḥahidnā

ʾan taqūlū yawma-l-qiyāmati ʾinnā kunnā ʾan ḥadḥā ḡḥāfilīn

And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam
from their spines their seed
and made them bear witness about themselves,
“Am I not your Lord?”
they said, “Without doubt, We see it!”

(This)

Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection,
“Oh! We didn’t know.”

(al-ʾAʿrāf 7:172)

¹⁸taqwa = from waqā = guard, preserve, safeguard, shelter, protect. Commonly translated as ‘God’ fearing, pious, devout etc.

This was our very first *Shahādah*, the *shahādah* of pre-eternity; the one which, when we know our Lord, which is to say when we are in touch with our spiritual self, prompts us in the first place to make our *shahādah* in time.

When this understanding dawns in the mind (*‘aql*), the heart (*qalb*), the self (*nafs*) of the human being and these elements are united with the spiritual self (*rūḥ*)¹⁹, — that self that was present in the *dhurriyyah*, which is to say the sub-atomic particle of self-conscious light which is the essential core of all being and which is sometimes referred to as the eternal²⁰ self: that self created in the best of forms (*‘ashsān taqwīm*),

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ﴾

laqad khālaqna-l-[‘]insānua fī [‘]aḥṣani taqwīm

“Surely We created the human in the best of forms.”

(*aṭ-Ṭīn* 95:4)

What we mean by timeless spirituality is the conscious merging with the underlying note of the ungoing continuum, that which is what is.

﴿قُلْ أَدْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ أَدْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ
أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ﴾

quli-[‘]d-[‘]ullāha [‘]aw-[‘]id-[‘]u-r-raḥmān :
[‘]ayyammā tad-[‘]ū falahu-l-[‘]asmā[‘]u-l-ḥusnā

“Call unto Allāh or call unto ar-Raḥmān:
whoever you call to it is the same
for His are the BeautifulNames.”

(*al-‘Isrā‘* 17:110)

¹⁹NOT ar-rūḥ which refers to Cosmic Spirit and about which we are cautioned not to say overmuch: “They will ask you about the Spirit. Say, “The Spirit is by the command of my Lord and we have been given but a little knowledge (*‘ilm*) [concerning the Spirit].” *al-Isrā‘* 17:85

²⁰Relatively speaking, for in Truth only Allāh ﷻ can be said to be truly Eternal (*as-ṣamad*).

These acts ordered by Allāh ﷻ and manifested by His Last and Perfect Messenger ﷺ have built into them the capacity for connecting one to that constant flow, that basic note which pervades the universe whether you take it as the āh of Allāh or the mā of Raḥmān.

Being in tune with this note feeds the soul and strengthens the ʿimān by removing fear, assuaging doubt, giving light to the heart and peace to the mind.

When the human is in this state it really doesn't matter if it is a high speed merge or the slow dissolution of the body into the state of endlessness.

This last will strike some as reminiscent of the most fragrant or flagrant statements of the worst of the ṣūfīs, the ḥulūlīs, who imagine that the human form is capable of sustaining the Absolute, a kind of incarnationism found in some Hindu doctrines of the avatar or the hypostasis of Christian doctrine.

That is not the case at all and is not what we are suggesting.

What we are referring to is the conscious voluntary departure from the body (*jism* and *jasad*) into the spirit (*rūḥ*) by way of the psyche (*nafs*) in line with the ʿāyāt:

﴿ يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ • ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً •
فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي • وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي • ﴾

yāā-ʿayyatuhā-nafus-l-muṭmaʿinnah • ʾirjiʿī ilā rabbika
rāḍiyatam-marḍiyyah • faʿdkḥulī fī ʿibādī wa-d-kḥulī jannatī

“Oh you soul at peace! Return to your Lord pleased and well pleasing. Enter among my worshippers. Enter My Garden.”

(*al-Fajr* 89:27-30)

The acts of worship in ʿIslam, given the level of realization (*ṣaʿiqā*) we have spoken of with the example of the Prophet Mūsā ؑ, are capable of yielding to the worshipful slave (ʿ*abd-ullāh*) the highest reaches of spiritual bliss and fulfillment.

This is of course not the reason for performing these acts of worship (ʿ*ibadah*), for that reason is no other than the Order of Allāh ﷻ that we lay our heads upon the ground, that we pass

some days without food and water and be replenished each evening, that we divest ourselves of our wealth in order that we may purify it and ourselves, and that Allāh who is the only ḡhani — the only One who we can say truly has any Wealth — blesses us with an abundance both externally, even if it is only bread and water, and internally, both thru the thick and the thin (*qabd wa baṣṭ*) with wealth no one can imagine save those who have actually seen His Reward to His most beloved ones ﷺ and sat gazing at the houses made of silver pearls.

So in all of this writing and speaking I am always coming back to a few simple thoughts regarding the most basic acts of worship (*‘ibadah*) that are both prescribed by Allāh and are so easy and open of access that anyone can fit inside them, young or old, male or female, from whatever nation, from whatever race or tribe or clan.

°Islām, the Ancient Way (*fitrah*) renewed by Mūḥammad ﷺ, is the Universal Solvent that dissolves all confusion and contains within it the food that all are seeking, the water that can quench the thirst of all that thirst, the brilliance that can illuminate the minds of all those who seek and the peace that can comfort the heart of all those who are anxious.

Eventually on our death beds each of must finally surrender.

﴿ اَلْهٰكُمُ التَّكٰثُرُ . حَتّٰى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ . كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُوْنَ .
ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُوْنَ . كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِيْنَ . ﴾

°alḥākumu-t-takāthur ḥattā zur tumu-l-maqābir • kalla ; sawfa ta‘lamūn • ṭhumma kallā ; sawfa ta‘lamūn • kallā ; ləw ta‘lamūna ‘ilma-l-yaqīn •

“ Rivalry in piling up worldly goods distracts you until you come to the graves. Surely but you will come to know.

Surely then you will come to know.

Surely you will know with certain knowledge.”

(*at-Takāthur* 102:1-4)

Of this there can be and is no doubt.

Allāh offers us the possibility of surrendering over and over before we die, which is perhaps why it is said,

“Die before you die if you would live forever.”

All the acts of worship, when perfectly entered into, and even when not perfectly entered into but blessed by the Mercy of Allāh ﷻ, provide the means to other levels of awareness,

﴿وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ﴾

wa-llāhu yarzuqu mañy-yashhā^u bi-ghayri ḥisāb

“And Allāh provides for whom He wills without accounting.”

(an-Nūr 24:38)

This is so much so that the poorest and most abject of his worshippers, His devotees, His slaves (‘*abdullāh*’) are granted His Mercy even though they know they are not deserving.

﴿يَعْبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

yā‘ibādiya-l-ladhīna ^uasrafū ‘alāā ^uanfusihiḥim lā taqnatū mir-rahḥmati-llāh ; ^uinna-llāha yaḡḡfiru-dh-dhunuba jami‘ā^u ; ^uinnahū huwa-l-ḡhafūru-r-rahīm

“Oh My worshipful slaves who have been prodigal against your [own] selves. Do not despair of the Mercy of Allāh who forgives all sins. Truly He is the Forgiving, The Merciful.”

(az-Zumar 39:53)

When people are in touch with the Raḥmāh of Allāh they lose their fear of false idols like wealth and beauty and fame, name and personal glory, for they know in truth how fleeting all is.

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ﴾

wa mā-l-ḡayyātu-d-dunyāā ^uillā la‘ibuñw-wa lahw

“and what is the worldly life but play and mindless diversion.”

(al-‘Anām 6:32)

They know that there is nothing to hold on to save the rope of Allāh (*ḡabli-l-lāh*), for in truth everything and everyone is perishing. There is nothing that will endure in this world — even the world itself and all that is upon it.

﴿ كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ • وَ يَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴾

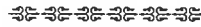
kullun man ‘alayhā fān •

wa yabāqā wajhu rabbika dhu-l-jalāli wa-l-‘ikrām

“Everything on the earth shall be annihilated.
and yet there remains the Face of your Lord
full of Majesty and Glory.”

(ar-Raḥmān 55:26-27)

In truth the rope of Allāh is what is connected to the source. As such it is an artifact of eternity in the world of exile.



It should not be thought that in writing of these acts of worship we are somehow urging or encouraging extremes of behaviour. On the contrary, we only seek to open out some of the latent dimensions of acts that are deeply integrated into the fabric of the everyday life of most practising Muslims.

All of these acts of worship are constituent parts of an integral whole. As Muslims we are ever reminded by Allāh ﷻ and by his Prophet ﷺ to seek the middle way between extremes of over-zealous concentration on the prescribed rites and the obligations which are a consequence of our being human, and the counter extremes of worldliness and temporality.

“The Prophet ﷺ made a bond of brotherhood (ākhyi) between Salmān ﷺ and Abu ad-Dardā’ ﷺ.

Salmān ﷺ visited ad-Dardā’ ﷺ and found his wife ﷺ dressed in shabby clothes and he asked her why she was dressed like that. She said, ‘Your brother ad-Dardā’ ﷺ is not interested in the luxuries of this world.’ In the meantime ad-Dardā’ ﷺ arrived and prepared a meal for Salmān ﷺ and when it was complete Salmān asked ad-Dardā’ ﷺ to eat with him, but ad-Dardā’ ﷺ replied that he was fasting, whereupon Salmān ﷺ said that he would not eat unless ad-Dardā’ ﷺ ate with him.

Night came and part of it passed when ad-Dardā’ ﷺ got up (to pray the voluntary deep of the night

ṣalāh) but Salmān told him to sleep and ad-Dardā' ﷺ slept. After some time ad-Dardā' ﷺ got up again and again Salmān ﷺ told him to sleep. When the last hours of the night were reached then Salmān ﷺ told him to get up and both of them offered the ṣalāh together.

Salmān ﷺ told him, "Your Lord has a right (*haqq*) on you, your body has a right on you and your family has a right on you; so give each its rights."

ad-Dardā' went to the Prophet ﷺ and narrated the whole story and he replied, 'Salmān ﷺ has spoken the truth.'" (Abu Juḥayfa ﷺ narrated it, Bukḥārī ﷺ transmitted it)

We must always keep in mind that all of the prescribed rites and rituals are made to fit easily within the context of one's life and the life of one's family. Allāh ﷻ made clear that monasticism was something invented by people and not something which He prescribed for people. (Q57:27). In a very important ḥadīth the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said that marriage is fully one half of the dīn. Thus the 'arkān are the necessary means to attainment of spaciousness and timelessness but, and this must be clearly understood, they are not the sole means.

Since the advent of the last dispensation of 'Islām, there have been critics who found fault with this attitude, which they find to be permissive and even licentious. From a Muslim perspective such people, through undue concentration on the other world, have lost sight of this world. The Muslim tries to remember that Allāh ﷻ is the Lord of *all* the Worlds and all realms are part of His Creation.

With that perspective in mind let us look more closely at the act of ṣalāh and attempt to see how this action performed, often in the very midst of the flow of life²¹, can yield the state of timelessness of which we have been speaking.

²¹For instance in travelling, when one must stand for the ṣalāh in the work-place, or some corner of an airport, or by the side of the road, and this is especially true for Muslims who live in the West where masājīd are still few and far between, though this, alḥamdulillāh, is changing.

To begin with it is necessary (*wājib*) for the one who wishes to enter the ṣalāh to be in a state of ritual purity (*aṭ-ṭaharah*) which entails either a major or minor act of purification performed with water, or if water is not available, with dust.²²

The first is the minor purification (*al-wuḍūʿ*), which means to wash certain parts of the body with the intention of worship using water not changed by anything. The basis for it is found in the Qurʾān (meaning), “O believers when you go to pray, wash your faces, and wash your forearms to the elbows, wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles,” (Q5:6) and in the saying (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet ﷺ related by Muslim رحمه الله, “Worship (*ṣalāh*) is not accepted without purification.” Four things make the *wuḍūʿ* necessary: anything liquid, solid or gaseous that exits from the front or rear private parts; the loss of consciousness through sleep, unconsciousness or insanity; touching of the skin of another person with desire; touching of one’s intimate private parts with the palm or the inner surface of the fingers.

The second is the major purification (*ghuṣl*), which means to totally wash the entire body from head to foot, with water not changed by anything. *Ghuṣl* is incumbent on a man when sperm is ejaculated from his organ or the head of his organ enters the vagina. *Ghuṣl* is incumbent on a woman when sexual fluid exits from her or the head of the male organ enters her vagina or after her menstrual period or after her postnatal bleeding stops or, in the case of a dry birth, directly after the child is born.

In the case that water is not available, or if one is ill or fears thirst due to lack of water, then one may make both the minor and the major ablution with dust. In this case, after first forming the intention (*nīyah*), one strikes the earth with one’s palms twice and then wipes first the face and then the right hand and arm up to the elbow and then the left hand and arm up to the elbow.

²²Note here how eminently practical Allāh ﷻ has made His Orders, for surely there is nothing more ubiquitous in this world than water or dust.

It should be clear to the reader that, even on the most gross physical plane, such attention to purity and purification would have a salutary effect on the practitioner. The Prophet ﷺ said, “If a man had a stream flowing by his door and he bathed in it five times daily do you not think he would be cleansed thereby?”

Each of these three means to purification can in themselves be vehicles to the timeless realm. As in all instances it depends upon the state (*ḥal*) and station (*maqam*) of the person who is performing them.

It is obvious, but within what is obvious (*dhāhir*) is also what is less obvious and what is well hidden (*bāṭin*).

What is obvious is clear. What is less obvious is the effect of such purification over a long period of time not just on the body, but on the inner self. Consider that in the process of the minor purification, given the cleanliness of the lower end of the alimentary canal and the sexual organs, seven major body parts are purified: hands, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, head, feet. Consider how each of these body parts can lead us, each of us, so easily and so often away from Allāh ﷻ and into disobedience to Allāh ﷻ and rebellion against that which Allāh ﷻ has prescribed for us.

Thus the or God-fearing or God-conscious (*mutaqqī*) person is not content with merely washing these various parts of his or her body but, beyond, that physical washing, believers are concerned to keep these limbs and organs from disobedience and rebellion in the first place. To do so, to act in such a manner, is no doubt a step along the way to perfection and wholeness (*ṣalāh*), individual and communal.

What is hidden can be found both in water and in dust.

Water which is in no way changed.

What is water? What is meant by water which is in no way changed? Imagine water in a crystal clear glass. Imagine that a drop of ink from a fountain pen is added to the water. Is that water the same? What is really meant by adultery? What has been changed? What has been altered?

Consider what is meant then by the necessity of water not changed by something else, not only as an outer requirement but as a description of the inner state necessary for truly making ablution. A state to which nothing impure is added. How does one arrive at such a state? Or how often is one in such a state? Every part of every one of these 'arkān which I lay out before you has hidden, not so hidden and obvious dimensions. Try to understand them as such.

By pure, we mean water to which no 'thing' has been added, which is to say, unadulterated water. By this, those of understanding have meant that purification is attained when the medium or agent is not adulterated by any desire, which is to say that one is for, by, to and with Allāh ﷻ alone without an other.

This is the purest water and it is the water of heavenly realms. Such water is, however, not always ready to hand or easy to come by, so one is allowed by Law to make use of less pure water, such as water melted from snow or water flowing in a stream into which other things may have washed but which, due to its flow and volume, is clean. This water is likened by those of knowledge to purifying oneself out of desire for the rewards of Allāh ﷻ and fear of His chastisements.

There is another form of water which is totally unsuitable, and that is water which has been adulterated. By Law this is said to be 'changed by impurity', which those of knowledge understand to be by the existence of the self (*an-nafs*), for it is impossible to purify the self by the self.

If there is no unadulterated water one uses 'the dust of the earth', which is to say the apparent (*adh-dhāhir*). In this way one purifies oneself by the 'given' without necessarily having access to the 'meaning'. This is the pure obedience of the surrendered ones who say,

﴿ سَمِعْنَا وَ أَطَعْنَا ﴾

sami'c nā wa 'aṭa'c nā

"...we hear and we obey..."
(*al-Baqarah* 2:285)

Worship in ʿIslām, as in all traditions, takes many forms. Some of these forms are supererogatory but if they are they find their basis in the custom (*sunnah*) of the Prophet, ﷺ. They include supplications, litanies, orisons, petitions, invocations, solicitations, adorations, thanksgiving and, in general, the praise of Allāh ﷻ.

aṣ-Ṣalāh is the name of a very specific form of worship which is prescribed for the Muslim, containing within it all of the various aspects of worship mentioned above.

This ṣalāh²³ is prescribed for all adult, sane and free men and women five times daily. The times or periods of the ṣalāh are also prescribed. They begin²⁴ with the ṣalāh that comes immediately after the sun appears to have set beneath the western horizon. This is the time of al-maghrib. The next period commences when all the colour has gone out of the sky and the stars shine forth. This is al-ʿishāʾ. After this, depending on the season of the year, comes the time of the deep night in which there is no obligatory ṣalāh, but people often rise during the mid and late night watches to offer sunnah ṣalāh until the time when the first crack (*falaq*) of light appears on the eastern horizon. This ushers in the third period, which lasts until just before the sun appears to rise above the eastern horizon. This is al-fajr. When the sun appears to just pass its zenith, the fourth period commences, which is called aḍḥ-ḍḥuhr, and this lasts until the time when, if you stood a two meter stick on its end, the shadow cast by the sun would be twice the length of the rod. This is the fifth period or al-ʿaṣr. These then are the five periods of time in which all adult free sane men and women are obliged to enter into the ṣalāh in order to offer worship to their Creator and Lord, Allāh the Most Holy.

Such are the periods of time — the ‘when’, as it were, of our being. And if we know when it is we are in time, so also must we know ‘where’ it is that we are in space.

²³There is no translation possible. It includes all of the aforementioned dimensions of worship and then some.

²⁴According to the Islamic way of reckoning, the new day begins at sunset rather than the middle of the night.

Orientation and direction are determined by knowing the bearings of the most ancient house (*bayt al-‘atīq*) of worship which is located in Makkah²⁵, a desert city sited in a barren valley on the Arabian peninsula. It is a simple cubical (*ka‘bah*) structure made of rough stone. Its foundations were raised by ‘Ibrāhīm, and his first born son, ‘Isma‘īl ﷺ on the spot where our original parents — Adam and his wife Hawa (Eve), ﷺ — worshipped Allāh ﷻ when they had been rejoined on earth after leaving the Garden (*al-jannah*). It is the same unadorned place of worship into which Muḥammad ﷺ, in his younger years, re-set the cornerstone during one of its rare, but periodic restorations, and it is the same place of worship that he later, in his adulthood cleansed of idols and so restored the Ka‘bah to the original Adamic state in which ‘Ibrāhīm and ‘Isma‘īl, ﷺ, had worshipped Allāh ﷻ.

I have heard people who are not Muslims say that we worship this building or that we worship the black meteor which serves as its cornerstone. This is untrue. The Ka‘bah is no more and no less than the first place where human beings worshipped Allāh ﷻ upon this earth — the place where worship originated here on earth. We orient our selves to it in remembrance of those origins as the first place of worship²⁶ of the first man and woman ﷺ on this planet who became aware (*‘arafah*) of the Reality that is Allāh ﷻ, the Lord of All the Worlds.

They did this in the Valley of Knowing (*al-‘arafah*) wherein is both the Mount of Mercy (*jabalu-rahmah*) and the Mount of Light (*jabal an-nūr*).

²⁵In the beginning of the dispensation granted to Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, the Muslims faced towards al-Quds ash-Sharīf {Jerusalem} as they did after the time of Yaqūb {Jacob}, peace be upon him. After the Muslims had settled in Madīnah {which had many Jewish date growers}, the chief rabbi, ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām, recognised and accepted ‘Islām. Shortly thereafter Allāh sent down the Revelation which changed the direction {qiblah} to Makkah. This was in the second year of the Hijrah during the month of Sha‘bān and some 16 months after the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, had made his Hijrah {Migration} from Makkah to Madīnah.

²⁶And the place to which we return in pilgrimage (*al-Ḥajj*).

I have also heard it said that Muslims always face toward the East when they make their 'prayers' or ṣalāh, but this also is another misconception, for, in truth, we face in whatever direction (*qiblah*) aligns us most directly to the Ancient House in Makkah. Thus people on the Indian sub-continent face to the West, people in central Asia face South-West, people in southern Africa face North East, people in Europe face South-East, and so forth.

But to return to the Ancient House. Ka'bah Sharīf.

Inside, there is nothing save two posts which hold up the central roof beam, some lamps for light, and a staircase which leads to the roof. There are no pictures, no stained glass, no statues. There is nothing to distract one from worship and focusing upon Allāh ﷻ.

Assuming the worshipper is in a state of ritual purity, and is facing the correct direction, and is within one of the prescribed and known time periods, let me proceed to delineate the movements of the ṣalāh.

The ṣalāh consists of five basic body positions: standing, bowing, prostrating, kneeling and a concluding turn to the right and the left. These positions are taken in utmost concentration and are combined, in accord with the time of day or night, in sets (*rak'ah*) of two, three or four.

Certain utterances and sets of words are connected to each position. Again, depending upon the time of day or night, these are spoken out loud or under the breath. Some of these utterances are derived from the Qur'ān, others are derived from prophetic supplications {*du'ā'*) and litanies (*'aḥzāb*) and yet others are supplications of the individual worshipper.

The duration of the ṣalāh is fixed by the number of cycles and the length of the Qur'ānic reading chosen by the individual worshipper (*'abid*) or the prayer leader (*'imām*). The shortest form²⁷ of the ṣalāh is that of the dawn (*fajr*) prayer which is two cycles (*rak'atayn*) in which the Qur'ānic verses are recited

²⁷Though this is the shortest form, the duration in time depends on the length or shortness of the Qur'ānic verses are read in the ṣalāh.

aloud. Both the noon (*adh-dhuhr*) and afternoon (*al-ʿaṣr*) ṣalāh are four cycles and in them the Qurʾānic verses are recited silently or beneath the breath. The ṣalāh which follows the setting of the sun (*al-maghrib*) consists of three cycles and in this ṣalāh the Qurʾānic verses of the first two cycles are recited aloud, as they are in the nighttime ṣalāh (*al-ʿishāʾ*), which again consists of four cycles rather than three. Supererogatory (*nafl* or *sunnah*) ṣalāh are, with a single exception, always two cycles (*rakʿatayn*). The single exception is the final supererogatory ṣalāh of the day which, fittingly, is a single cycle and which is called the *wiṭr* or odd numbered ṣalāh.

No doubt this may seem bewildering to a non-Muslim. In actuality, it is quite simple once one accepts this as the rhythm of life, in which case it follows that one then spends every day of what remains of one's life²⁸ following these cycles — often in different parts of the world and sometimes in sickness and other times in health, in good times and bad. It is a case of 'for better or worse until death do us part'. That is another part of the covenant with the Lord. Perpetual prayer.

Perhaps this recital of numbers and positions may sound mechanical, but the mechanical aspect is really dependent on one's interior state and whether one is fully 'present' or, on the contrary, absent. In the case of absence it appears as a long dull boring set of repetitive exercises accompanied, often, by learning another language and on top of that committing to memory long sets of verses (*ʿāyāt*) of the Qurʾān as well as prophetic supplications and litanies. Almost nothing is left to one's own personal initiative except *the doing*, the act, *al-ʿamal* and *al-ʾamal*, the hope. Yet at times in the course of all of this one touches the edges of that dimension referred to in the verse which tells us that there is a time which is better than a thousand months — 83 and one third years — or a lifetime.

²⁸Save in the case of women who are excused from the ṣalāh during their periods of menstruation and during childbirth and the days following it. There are also exceptions made both for men and women in the case of travelling when certain prayers can be shortened and joined to each other and in the case of sickness when one may make the ṣalāh in one's sick bed if need be.

﴿ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ ﴾

khayrum-min 'alfi shahr

“...better than a thousand months.”

(*al-Qadr* 97:3)

And there are lot of in-between times. But the ‘how’ in fact does not really matter, for what matters is the mimetic act mirroring in time our condition in the first world of particles (*‘alam adh-dharru-l-‘awwal*), when, floating in the column of light (*‘amudu-n-nūr*) in pre-eternity, formless light was transformed into form and we were content, individually and corporately, to praise Allāh ﷻ forever, overcome, as it was and as it is we are, by the Ineffable Majesty and Refulgent Glory of that Being.

Let me digress to relate a personal story here.

It was late winter or early spring in Alexandria. A time when the weather rolling out of the Great Middle Earth Sea is quirky and quixotic.

I was just recovering from a fall in which I had broken my ankle and was not yet able to leave the house to make my ṣalāh in the masjid and so I was making my ṣalāh at home.

It had been rainy most of the day and I could hear it being blown intermittently against the balcony windows on the other side of the house. Now and then there would come periods in which suddenly the clouds would part and blue sky would appear and golden sun would pour down to be lost in the garden that fronted the eastern side of the house in which was the room where I was convalescing.

The garden was of old Alexandria from before the time of tall buildings. Banana plants, some guavas, abundant flowers. giant split leafed palms and, against the brick wall of the next building, a number of royal palms, their trunks painted white.

On hearing the call to prayer from the masjid just down the street I rose somewhat unsteadily (the cast had just come off about a week earlier) and made my way to perform my wuḍūʿ.

Upon my return I stood for the ṣalāh with the window that overlooked the garden to my right, and after forming my intent and making the takbir (*Allāhu Akbar*), I commenced my ṣalāh.

The window ledge was low — just under eye level when one was kneeling. As I came to the end of my ṣalāh and was giving my salām to the right, my eye went out into the momentarily lit glowing garden below and time ceased to be.

What did I see? What did I hear? I have no idea but I felt myself transported far beyond time and space into a realm which was refulgent and pervaded by a sense of a feeling composed of ineffable mercy (*rahmāh*), peace (*salām*) and simple goodness (*laṭīf*). Whatever air I was breathing was pure and clear — sparkling with life (*ḥayy*) — invigorating.

I do not know how long I remained in that place until I completed my salām to the left. My bedside clock revealed nothing. Definitely my healing was accelerated from that point on and soon I was back to the masjid, but thereafter I made my nafl prayers in that place hoping once again to see what I saw.

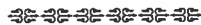
A much more exalted event, but along the same lines, took place when the Rasūl ﷺ arrived at the lote tree of the utmost boundary,

﴿وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ ۖ عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ ۖ
عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ ۖ إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ ۚ﴾

wa laqad ra'āhu nazlatan 'ukhrā • 'inda sidrati-l-muntahā •
'inda hā jannatu-l-ma'wā •
'idh yaghshā as-sidrata mā yaghshā

and he saw him another time by the lote tree of the farthest most boundary near to the garden of abode when that which veiled the lote tree veiled it [in nameless splendor]²⁹.

(*an-Najm* 53:13-16)



²⁹ “When the lote tree was veiled with whatever veiled it”, a phrase deliberately vague (*mubham*), indicative of the inconceivable majesty and splendor attaching to this symbol of paradise “which no description can picture and no definition can embrace (Muḥammad Assad & Zamakhsharī).

Every time that I am asked to write or give a paper I basically write and talk about essentially the same thing: sometimes it is peace, sometimes it is love of Allāh ﷻ, sometimes it is “the steady state” and sometimes it is what I call the timeless state.

No matter the name, I have found all of these states to be latent in the daily and lifetime experiences prescribed by Allāh ﷻ in the Qur’ān and manifested in the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

It was my original intention to proceed from the ṣalāh to the month of daily fasting (*aṣ-ṣawm*) and from that blessed time to the Purification of one’s wealth through the prescribed payment and reception of the zakāh, for there are many intimate connections between the Holy Month of Ramaḍān and the giving and receiving of zakāh.

Then I remembered that I had already written³⁰ about this from the perspective of the *tarbiyyah* (training practices) of the Prophet ﷺ, and so I direct the reader to that paper which contains a long discussion of the efficacy of those practices.

What is perhaps more to the point is really understanding what I am trying to communicate about the timeless state, about the great peace (*aṣ-salām*), about the eternal flow (*aṣ-ṣamad*), about the blossoming love (*maḥabbah*) and all-embracing mercy (*ar-rahmāh*) that is pervading all dimensions of being at all times and in every instance.

Connection with this state (*hāl*) provides one with the deeper view of what is really happening here.

It is my contention that the human being deprived from this deep soul connection is from the walking dead.

There are obviously different vectors from which this state may be viewed. The intellect (*al-‘aql*)³¹, the heart (*al-qalb*), the self (*an-naḥs*), the soul or the spirit (*ar-rūḥ*) at some level

³⁰*Reflection on the Possibilities of Perfection: Tarbiyyah of the Prophet ﷺ* a paper given in 1995. at the International Mawlid an-Nabi Conference in Chicago. Available from Noon Hierographers, Box 8, Keene, Va 22946

³¹Here I direct the reader to the discussion on the meaning of this ‘term’ *al-‘aql* in *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islām* by Muḥammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. SUNY Press

testify to the existence of such a state, at least as far as the mind, heart, being and soul all speak about something called light, called love, called peace, called bliss, that is capable of being apprehended at some level of each of those constituent warps or vectors.

If you reach far enough through the channels of the mind you are commonly said to be 'enlightened'. If you reach far enough through the channels of pure feeling you are said to be 'in love'. If you become so rooted in your practice you can really be said to have begun to be who you are or might be.

Which reminds me of a great shaykh ﷺ from Alexandria in whose masjid we used to pray 100 raka'ah on Laylatu-l-Qadr. This man died ﷺ in the midst of his sajdah in Ṣalatu-l-Ṭarrawih. This is the nafs taken to its real possibilities simultaneously manifest in both worlds.

From the position of the soul (*rūḥ*) all of these dimensions converge and the spirit is with itself at that moment when all of the sub-atomic particles worshipped in the presence of their Source, who spoke to them.

﴿أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۚ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا ۚ﴾

ʾalastu bi-rabbikum : qālū balā shahidnā

“Am I not your Lord?”

“They said, “Without doubt, We see it!”

(*al-ʾAʿrāf* 7:172)

What I believe, as a result of my own experiences and those of others whom I have met or whose accounts over the centuries I have read, is that experience in pre-eternity is available in the present moment of life.

Access to this realization, enlightenment, love, peace can be gained through the practices prescribed by Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān. The benefit of all of this is the strengthening of faith (*ʾimān*), the increase of certainty (*yaqīn*), the repose of being (*muṭmaʾin*) and the increase in the perception of compassion (*raḥmāh*) which leads to the ability to love.

This ability to love is much needed in the world.

I have often been criticised by well wishing friends of being too other-worldly due to my pre-occupation with the timeless state. They questioned its value.

I have tried to explain that it is my understanding that only when people are in touch with this merciful, loving, compassionate, refulgent 'Lord' at the center of their being can they ever really be said to be hu-man beings.

Peace is not something necessarily generated by peace conferences. Love cannot be given as a 'duty'. Enlightenment is not something which can be really pursued.

Quite to the contrary, the harder it is pursued the faster it recedes. So much of enlightenment has to do with the simple surrender (*'islām*) to what it is. So often the golden flower blooms only when we have finally surrendered our desire to 'see' it. This is well known.

There was a song from out of my youth which always has stuck in my mind.

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love —

It's the only thing that there is just too little of.”

It is my experience that people who have found a way to regularly put themselves in touch with all of which we are speaking generally act differently in the world.

It is not necessarily anything that translates itself to a broader scale, though in the case of the greatest Messengers and Prophets ﷺ the scale is, in fact, world wide.

Most often, at least in the past, it has been the light that illuminated a neighbourhood in a city or a village in the country.

I remember being in the south of Egypt, may Allāh ﷻ bless her people, and when it was time for juma^cah prayer 90% of the people from five or six villages passed up their local masjid to go the one where a certain Shaykh at -Ṭayib prayed.

What attracted them but his love of Allāh ﷻ and people?

He was neither the *khaṭīb* nor the leader of the prayer (*ʿimām*). He had no known position. He was nothing, but that nothingness had become translated into his whole manner of being. He was truly a poor man (*al-faqīr*) before his Lord.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ﴾

yāā ʿayuha-n-nāsu ʾantum-u-l-fuqarāāʾu ʾila-llāh
wa-llāhu huwa-l-ghaniyyu-l-ḥamid

“Oh people. You are the poor in relation to Allāh.
and Allāh is The Wealthy, The Praised.”

(*al-Fāṭir* 35:15)

After the *ṣalāh* was finished, he sat with the people until the time of *Ṣalātu-l-ʿAṣr*. Long tables made from bolts of cloth were laid. Everyone ate and drank sōda and tea and the kids played around and there was a lot of laughter and good feelings and goodwill among the people.

His was a true peace mission. Others talk about peace processes but this was peace in process.

Many other stories can be told of people in many different parts of the world who are fulfilling similar missions far from any spotlight or media notoriety or show biz glitter.

I have spent time with many of them, and I can safely say about all of them that they are extremely observant of their essential cleanliness (*ṭaharah*), their worship (*ṣalāh*), their devotions in the form of recitals of Qurʾān and various litanies (*ʿaḥzāb*) and supplications (*duʿāʾ*). They are usually the most avid fasters who do all the extra days, such as the 10 days after Ramaḍān, and the white days before, on and after the full moon of each month and all the other days or the Holy Months when devout (*muttaqī*) people fast.

That is by no means to say that all those who follow such a regimen are in the same state as this Shaykh aṭ-Ṭayib رحمه الله, for there is always the additional factor of grace (*barakah*) that is illusive in all cases and can never be fully weighed or measured, as it subject to the will of Allāh عز وجل in the matter.

﴿ فَأَلْسَكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ يُرْزَقُونَ فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴾

fa'ulāā'ika yadkhulūna-l-jannata
yurzaqūna fihā bi-ghayri ḥisāb

“They will enter the garden
where they will be provided for without stint.”

(*al-Mu'min* 40:40)

For some the contact with the pre-eternal state of worship leads simply to a rich and blessed family life, which serves also to touch those who come in contact with it in the course of life.

There comes to a mind a local grocer in Palestine, may Allāh ﷻ defend it and return al-Quds to the Muslims, whose face was filled with light and who always had a good word to say about everyone, even his oppressors.

His shop was just a few doors from the masjid and his house was just above the shop, so that all of his daily prayers, save for Yawmu-l-Juma'ah which he prayed in al-'Aqsa, his entire business and his family life were very tightly knit and closely centered.

Walking into his shop one always felt a lift and a certain lightness pervaded his workplace, and that was very important for the days in which I knew him were very difficult days for the Palestinians. Indeed I always observed that his vegetables glowed and I always felt fed from even a little of his food.

He always had a story to tell, usually based on some 'āyāt from the Qur'ān and always with a deep inner meaning which did not come from reading but, once sensed, from the presence.

﴿ فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا ءَاتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا
وَ عَلَّمْنَاهُ مِمَّا لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ﴾

fawajadā 'abdam-min 'ibādināā 'ātaynāhu rahmatam-min
'indinā wa 'allamnāhu mi-l-ladunnā 'ilmā

“They found one of our worshipful slaves unto whom We
had given Mercy from Us and have taught him knowledge
from Our Presence.”

(*al-Kahf* 18:65)

Even more obscure than our friend ʿAlī the Grocer are those rare ones you find in the back of masajid all over the Muslim world just sitting reciting Qurʾān or doing their beads.

One man, so very gentle and kind, told me, upon prodding, his story. This was in Makkah. He was a minor prince of the royal family who was entirely uninterested in the goings on and had reduced his existence to living in the Holy City and driving a taxi to support himself and his family.

He explained that he had figured out exactly how much he needed to live and had made a deal with himself to stop as soon as he had gathered together the needs of the day.

When he was reciting from the Qurʾān he was almost impossible to hear but when I sat behind a nearby pillar I was struck by the limpidity and unadorned character of his reading which was always from the heart and seldom from the throat.

Another such one was a seller of shoelaces in Fatimid Cairo somewhere near Bab Zuwailah. In winter he wore a long black overcoat and when I would catch him, usually after ʿAṣr, I would sit doing my own tasbiḥ and watch him as he sat framed against the garden courtyard in the old masjid hunched over a kursī on which rested a well-used mushaf.

It was from watching him that I learned that such beings actually glow. The first time I saw him reading I thought it was a trick of the light caused by the difference between the dim light of the masjid and the rather brighter light coming from the garden, but as I looked carefully I saw that it was him that was aglow. When I spoke to him I was stuck by the softness of his voice and the gentleness of his eye.

There are many stories about such beings and in many of these stories it comes out that such men are the spiritual mainstay of whole cities and even nations, yet they are hidden from the world and pass unnoticed by most of humanity.

None of these men felt themselves to be unusual. On the contrary, they thought of themselves as ordinary, or more than ordinary — invisible — disappeared in the peace in which they sat reciting Qurʾān or stood for their ṣalāh.

It is this that seems to me to be the utility of spirituality. The transformation that it brings about in people.

In a ḥadīth reported in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim ﷺ it is narrated on the authority of ʿAbdullāh bin Masʿūd ؓ that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “None shall enter the Fire who has in his heart the weight of a grain of mustard seed of ʾImān and none shall enter the Garden who has in his heart the weight of a grain of mustard seed of pride.”

Perhaps this then is the utility of spirituality, that it increases the weight of our ʾimān and steadily reduces the weight of our pride.

This life is short — eternity is long.

﴿ فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ • إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ •
لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ • وَ مَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ
رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

fa-ʾayna tadḥhabūn • ʾin huwa ʾilla dhirkul-l-ʿālamīn •
liman shāʾa minkum ʾaṅy-yastaqīm • wa mā tashāʾūna
ʾillā ʾaṅy-yashāʾa-llāhu rabbu-l-ʿālamīn

“So where are you going?

This is nothing other than a Reminder to all the worlds to
whoever wills to walk straight — and you will not, save
Allāh wills — Lord of All the Worlds.”

(at-Takwīr 81:26-29)

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Completed on a rainy night in Virginia on the first day of July
in the year 1997 corresponding to the 27th day of Ṣafar in the
year 1418 of the Hijrah.

May it be of benefit to someone.

و الله أعلم

And Allāh knows best

من الفقير إلا ربه، عبد الله نور الدين دوركي



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